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BRITISH COLUMBIA

Speech from the Throne

The Honourable Garde B. Gardom
Lieutenant-Governor
at the Opening of the
Second Session, Thirty-Seventh Parliament
of the
Province of British Columbia
July 24, 2001

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members.

It is with great pleasure that I address you to open the Second Session of the Thirty-Seventh Parliament of British Columbia.

Prior to delivering my eighth and, I'm sure, final Speech from the Throne, may I firstly say it has been an enormous privilege to have served over the past six years as Her Majesty's representative. And secondly, I wish to express my most sincere thanks and gratitude to British Columbians throughout the province for their many courtesies and assistance.

I wish also to express everyone's thanks to former Chief Justice Allan McEachern. This May 18, he retired following 21 years of outstanding service on the bench, including 10 years as Chief Justice of our Supreme Court, and the past 11 years as Chief Justice of the B.C. Court of Appeal and Administrator for the Province. His extraordinary intellect, insightful and even-handed application of the law, and remarkable leadership will forever be an inspiration to all British Columbians.

I also wish to congratulate the Honourable Iona Campagnolo, who will succeed me as Lieutenant-Governor this coming September 25th.

I am sure that my colleague will find her tenure as interesting and gratifying as has been mine and I wish her every fulfilment, for it has been a responsibility and honour that I have thoroughly enjoyed and have been remarkably privileged to fulfill. I can assure you, honourable members, that Mrs. Gardom and I will treasure many memories from our years in public service, and most especially, those of the people of beautiful British Columbia who have so enriched our lives along the way.

Sadly, each year carries with it the passing of many outstanding British Columbians, and this year is no exception. We marked the passing of Mike Horsey, a man who will always be beloved for the contribution he made to British Columbia as a public servant and citizen of the highest order.

Former Squamish Nation Chief Simon Baker and former Cheam First Nation Grand Chief Sam Douglas will also be sorely missed, as will Ed Oscapella, an icon and champion of the arts community. And we all owe a special debt of

gratitude to the legendary Jack Diamond, who gave more to his province and the horse racing industry than we will ever know.

On May 16, the people of British Columbia elected a new parliament and a new government. In so doing, they supported my government's sweeping vision for economic, social and institutional revitalization.

This is a time of great promise for all British Columbians, led by a new government with a strong mandate for positive change. A mandate to usher in a new era of hope, prosperity and public service.

Fulfilling that mandate won't be easy. It will take fortitude, it will take resolve and it will take tenacity. It will require reaching out to British Columbians to involve them in the critical decisions and choices that will affect their lives.

And it will take a concerted effort from every member of this Assembly working cooperatively and constructively to find common solutions to common challenges. It will take a commitment to openness, transparency and accountability.

It will require transforming the process of public policy-making in British Columbia, to ensure that each and every MLA has a vital role to play. It will require an unswerving commitment to the value of diversity of ideas and opinion. And it will challenge my government and our society at large to invite open, honest debate and constructive criticism. The maturity to accept respectful public engagement must allow for respectful public disagreement.

Fulfilling my government's mandate will demand an unflagging commitment to the principles and values that underpin our free enterprise society.

Fairness. Equality of opportunity and responsibility. Equality under the law. Compassion for those in need. Competition and choice. Innovation. Risk. Strategic planning. Fiscal responsibility. To that we can add my government's firm belief in the value of a professional, non-partisan public service.

Public trust and confidence in government must be earned, not through words but through deeds. Qualities of honesty, integrity and competence must be earned by degrees over the months and years to come.

The size of my government's unprecedented mandate carries with it an enormous obligation to meet British Columbians' desire for a government they can trust and respect. And to fulfill that aspiration, my government appreciates that it must significantly raise the bar of conduct and performance in everything that it does.

First and foremost, my government will be true to its word. The people who elected it demand and deserve no less. That is not simply my government's mandate; it is also it's duty.

My government will not shrink from its responsibilities or shy away from its commitments. All ministers will be held personally and collectively accountable for honouring my government's election platform promises.

To underscore that point, for the first time in our province's history, my government will require all Cabinet ministers to meet specific performance commitments as a condition for receiving their full pay cheques. That is true accountability and a strong incentive for all ministers to ensure that commitments made will be kept, now and in the future.

Beyond that, my government will implement a number of initiatives aimed at enhancing arm's-length accountability. With just two seats in this Legislature currently held by MLAs who do not sit in my government's Caucus, the need for greater self-imposed accountability is obvious.

My government will therefore embrace the Speaker's inventive initiative to make Question Period more inclusive. Under this proposal, British Columbians serving in a range of elected capacities outside of the Legislature will be invited to submit written questions to the Speaker. Questions will be drawn by lot and then put to my government by MLAs during Question Period.

There are many worthy social objectives that my Cabinet will pursue. However, there are 10 overarching priorities.

They include:

1. A top-notch education system for students of all ages;
2. High quality public health care services that meet all patients' needs, where they live and when they need it;
3. A thriving private sector economy that creates high-paying job opportunities.
4. Safer streets and schools in every community;

5. Better services for children, families and First Nations;
6. The fastest growing technology industry in Canada;
7. A leading edge forest industry that is globally recognized for its productivity and environmental stewardship;
8. Greater equity and equality for British Columbia in Canada;
9. An open and accountable government;
10. And responsible, accountable management of British Columbians' public resources and tax dollars.

All of these objectives are goals my government shares in common with British Columbians. They transcend the barriers that have too often divided us from one another along any number of ideological lines.

Accomplishing these worthy goals will demand more of each citizen, starting with the members of this Assembly.

We know there is not an elected person who does not want to solve the crisis that exists in our public health care system, or to make our public education system the best it can be. There is not one who does not wish to forge a

relationship of reconciliation with First Nations through workable, affordable treaties which provide certainty, equality and finality.

My government wants all British Columbians to have an equal chance to participate in the new knowledge economy, get our economy on track and get our province's fiscal house in order.

While the challenges we face may be unprecedented, they are not unmanageable. In each challenge lies a solution that holds within it a world of opportunity.

It is that profoundly important mission and obligation to which, honourable members, you have committed yourselves. You are all agents of change, empowered to convert ideas into action and dreams into realities.

The task ahead is exciting, demanding and ripe with possibility. And I commend all members for the commitment that you and your families have made as you embark on this exciting new journey.

My government has moved swiftly to put its action plan in motion. In its New Era platform, it has vowed that it would act to initiate a number of specific changes within 90 days of

being sworn into office. The wording of that commitment is deliberate and important. It does not prejudge or limit the time frame needed for due diligence, debate, or consultation. But it does oblige my government to act to initiate each of those promised outcomes by September 3, 2001.

Many of those commitments have already been fully met. The remainder will be initiated in the next few weeks. Moreover, every piece of legislation introduced in furtherance of those 90-day commitments — as with any New Era promise — my government will regard as a vote of confidence.

A New Era of Prosperity

On its very first full day in office, my government delivered on its most widely publicized campaign promise: to give all British Columbians a dramatic cut in their personal income taxes.

Personal income tax rates were cut across the board by an average of 25 percent.

By January, B.C. taxpayers will have the lowest base personal income tax rate in Canada for the bottom two tax brackets.

B.C. taxpayers will also enjoy the second lowest marginal tax rate in Canada.

Also as promised, those tax commitments will be honoured without cutting funding for health or education.

The announced income tax cut is only the first of many measures aimed at delivering on my government's overriding commitment to usher in a new era of prosperity. A new era marked by fair taxes, reduced red tape, greater flexibility, increased choice, globally competitive policies, and higher take-home pay.

My government considers economic growth the critical determinant of our ongoing quality of life in British Columbia. It is the key to our ability to provide for our families, to sustain our communities, and to adequately fund crucial public services like health care, education, child protection and public safety.

Renewing our economy is unquestionably my government's top priority. All of our legitimate public expenditure needs are ultimately limited by the revenues that define our ability to pay for them. All of the major public policy challenges we face today are feeling the brunt of that reality.

No government can sustain the most expensive public services in the country with one of the weakest economies.

British Columbians are well positioned to show the world what we can do when we unleash the power of free enterprise.

Again, my government will lead the way in holding itself accountable for measuring the success of its economic recovery program.

A new B.C. Progress Board has been appointed that will establish specific economic, social and environmental benchmarks and targets for the tax, regulatory and fiscal reforms that my government will undertake.

This independent panel of senior business executives will report to the Premier twice a year on our province's economic progress in comparison with other provinces. The Board's findings will play an important role in helping to improve British Columbia's competitiveness. It will hold my government to account for its performance and progress.

My government vowed to conduct a comprehensive review of the province's finances within 90 days. That promise has been kept. The results have been made public.

Also, as promised, amendments will be introduced this session to ensure that all provincial finances are fully and accurately reported according to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles. The use of special warrants will be permanently eliminated. And Crown Corporations will be held to account by a committee of the Legislature.

These changes, coupled with my government's commitment to balance the budget by its third full budget, will help restore investor confidence in the state of our economy and government finances.

My government's core services review process will also bolster public confidence. Each and every program, agency, board, commission and Crown Corporation will be thoroughly assessed to ensure that every function assumed by government has, in fact, a compelling public purpose and that it reflects our current fiscal situation.

My government will review its services from top to bottom, to ascertain how they might be delivered more cost effectively, efficiently and in customer-friendly ways.

As a general economic strategy, my government is committed to enhancing the competitive playing field upon which all businesses — small and large — seek to prosper.

Its first step was making sure our personal income tax structure is not only competitive, but also advantageous for all who choose to live and work in British Columbia.

My government believes in encouraging the value and rewards of work through higher take-home pay. All British Columbians should know that if they work hard, they can get ahead.

The personal income tax cuts will help, but they are not enough. My government's objective is to respond to our current fiscal and economic malaise by doing more, not less. It will act boldly to restore confidence and make the world take note that our province is under new management that believes in competition and embraces the principle of profit.

My government believes that profit is not a negative word. It is the lifeblood of investment, job creation and prosperity for working families and communities. High taxes have sapped the profitability of businesses of all sizes, in every sector. Most of all, they have hurt our young and unemployed.

My government will act on its commitment to phase out taxes on investment and on productivity, in order to make our province a magnet for all who want to help renew our economy.

To get our economy back on track, we must also restore flexibility and rights in the workplace, for employees and employers alike.

This session, my government will restore workers' right to their pensions and will repeal the law that allows some pension plans to suspend pension benefits for early retirees who choose to continue working in their previous field of employment.

My government will also honour its commitment to restore workers' democratic right to a secret ballot vote on certification under the *Labour Code* and it will ensure that the same rules apply for certification as for decertification.

It will outlaw sectoral bargaining and restore all workers' right to negotiate their contracts.

It has already moved to eliminate the HCL union-only "hiring hall" requirement on highway construction projects and government-sponsored silviculture contracts.

And my government will act this session to restore open tendering on government contracts to allow fair competition for businesses to provide better value for taxpayers.

Fixed wage legislation will be repealed, to reduce costs to taxpayers on public construction projects.

Business subsidies will be eliminated that give some companies an unfair advantage over their competitors.

These measures will restore fairness for working families and competing businesses, while enhancing confidence in our free enterprise economy.

In every major economic sector, my government is acting to foster a new era of economic prosperity and opportunity.

That goal will be significantly advanced by my government's new Minister of Competition, Science and Enterprise.

He will work closely with the new Minister of State for Deregulation to help all job creators become more competitive. His objective is to eliminate unnecessary, expensive, job-killing

regulations, without compromising environmental standards, public health or public safety.

All ministers have been given a firm mandate to ensure my government makes good on its deregulation commitment to reduce the regulatory burden by one-third within three years.

My government will streamline bureaucratic processes and enhance efforts to eliminate the backlog in Crown land applications, which have cost our economy over one billion dollars in lost revenue and an estimated 20,000 lost jobs.

It will fulfill its promise to increase access to Crown lands and resources, to create jobs in tourism, mining, forestry, farming, ranching and oil and gas extraction.

Over the next year, my government will make the Workers' Compensation Board more responsive to the needs of injured workers and employers alike.

And still more will be done to kick-start our economy.

Our province is in a tremendous competitive position to win the bid to host the 2010 Winter Olympics at Whistler.

My government said that it will aggressively support and champion that bid, and it will. The Premier will spearhead this endeavour, assisted by a Minister of State who will assume special responsibility.

This is an outstanding opportunity to showcase our province to the world. It will benefit every region in British Columbia. The Olympic spirit will touch not just our young athletes and coaches, but also our artists, musicians and indeed all our citizens.

My government will double the physical fitness and amateur sport fund to $44 million over four years, and that will be initiated this year.

My government wants the Olympics to build a lasting legacy of excellence in British Columbia. A new Olympic Arts Fund will also be established with an initial commitment of five million dollars this year and matching commitments in the years to follow.

The benefits of B.C.'s bid to host the 2010 Winter Olympics will highlight the strengths of our diversity and extend well beyond sports and the arts to other key sectors like tourism, retail and construction.

No sector is more important to our economy than our forest industry, a sector that has been hard hit over the last several years. It has gone from one of the lowest cost producers of fibre in North America to one of the highest cost producers.

My government plans to turn that around.

It is acting on its promise to either fix or scrap Forest Renewal B.C.

A special government task force has also been appointed to oversee a process for aggressively combating the massive pine beetle infestation that has devastated so much forestland in our Northern Interior.

My government will also work to take a leadership role in addressing the softwood lumber issue. That international trade dispute will not be easily resolved. British Columbians should be under no illusions about the serious ramifications of the potential for a major American countervail on our softwood lumber products.

Such a countervail, if imposed, will challenge the creativity and competitive mettle of the entire Canadian forest industry.

British Columbia's exports represent 60 percent of Canada's entire softwood trade with the U.S. and it will take leadership and statesmanship to foster the necessary common resolve to ensure our lumber products have fair, unfettered access to United States markets.

We must not allow an unfounded propaganda war waged against our workers, communities and forest industry to succeed. As promised, my government will apply one percent of all direct forest revenues, not including "super stumpage," to promote global marketing of B.C.'s forest practices and products.

We must also all recognize that the forest industry has been dramatically altered in the last years. Thousands of B.C. workers have paid a personal price for that change. Hence, more must be done to modernize our economy's number one industry, to ensure it remains an industry that can sustain itself as it sustains our communities.

Our task is enormously difficult, but it is achievable.

As we fight for free and open access for our products in our largest customer's marketplace, my government will pursue the fundamental

changes required to create a globally competitive forest industry which is renowned for its excellence in forest stewardship.

My government will develop a more fair and flexible stumpage system that is responsive to market realities.

As part of the deregulation initiative, the *Forest Practices Code* will also be improved over the next year. Forest practices will be based on sound science that recognizes the diversity of forest environments across this vast province. A modernized Code must demand results and provide for tough penalties for those who fail to perform.

Another sector of our economy which offers enormous promise is the oil and gas industry.

For over two years, northern British Columbians have waited for government leadership to explore the enormous opportunities of offshore oil and gas off our North Coast. The potential gains and risks could be enormous. Therefore, over the next six months, my government will examine the possibility of converting those rich reserves into jobs and opportunities for northern working families.

An independent scientific review panel will be appointed to address the hard questions that must be answered before we can consider realizing this potential.

It will ascertain whether those resources can, in fact, be extracted in a way that is scientifically sound and environmentally responsible, with its initial findings being tabled by January 31, 2002.

Our technology industries are another key economic sector that my government will target for immediate attention. The tax reduction and deregulation initiatives now underway will help our leading edge technology firms grow and prosper right here in British Columbia.

They will also help to reverse the "brain drain" that has seen many of our brightest and best leave British Columbia for opportunities elsewhere.

My government will act on its 90-day commitment to establish a new Premier's Council on Technology. Eminent British Columbians have agreed to sit on the Council and help to guide us to establish our province as a global leader in technology.

The Council will be comprised of technology leaders, educators and researchers, and it will meet quarterly. Initially it will be tasked with recommending solutions to bridge the "digital divide."

In addition, the Council will work closely with my government's Chief Information Officer to identify ways in which Web-based technologies can be used to enhance my government's interaction with our citizens and businesses.

There's no end of tremendous opportunities for efficiency and connectivity in "e-government" which have not yet been utilized for public benefit. Tapping into those opportunities wherever they exist is a central goal of my government. My government will also pioneer opportunities in on-line procurement technology, to save costs and maximize taxpayers' value-for-money on all major government purchases.

A New Era of Hope

My government's new era of hope will extend beyond the economy to critical services for people.

It is vital that all British Columbians have the skills and tools to fully benefit from, and fully participate in, our new economy.

Of the many responsibilities government has, none is more important than its duty to provide a top-notch education system for students of all ages.

As promised, legislation will be introduced this session to restore education as an essential service under the *Labour Code*. No child's right to an education should be denied because of a school strike or lockout.

My government also intends to encourage parents to become more involved in public education. First and foremost, teachers and parents will be invited to help us secure the best education system anywhere. My government will introduce legislation this session to ensure parents of students attending schools are entitled to volunteer their services. And it will restore funding to parent advisory councils in schools across B.C.

Over the next year, changes will also be made to restore the strength and autonomy of local school boards. My government will support more flexibility and increased choice in public schooling; it will give school boards more autonomy and control over the delivery of education services; it will introduce three-year rolling funding envelopes to improve long-term

planning and budgeting; and it will establish specific goals and outcomes to better measure the success of our education system.

And my government will work with our colleges, institutes and universities to enhance advanced education.

It will meet its election commitment to double the annual number of graduates in computer science, and electrical and computer engineering within the next five years.

It will honour its campaign pledge to establish a "Leading Edge Endowment Fund," cost-shared with the private sector. It will create 20 permanent "B.C. Leadership Chairs" in environmental, social, technological and medical research. That financial commitment will be fully funded over the next four years.

In the next few weeks, my government will enhance training programs for health care aides and licensed practical nurses. It will also increase support to upgrade training for existing health care providers and enhance efforts to enable more foreign-trained nurses and non-practising nurses to get the education and retraining they need and want.

Those are just some of the measures that my government will take to focus taxpayers' education dollars where they are needed the most.

In health, as in education, proper planning is critical.

Although my government will meet its commitment to maintain this year's overall $9.3 billion health budget, it is clear that the pressure for health services is rapidly outstripping our economy's and taxpayers' ability to fund those needs.

This year's health budget is almost one billion dollars more than last year's health budget and it is still not enough. Such an explosive growth in expenditures and costs clearly is not sustainable. It threatens to undermine the very foundation of our public health care system.

My government will not let that happen. We must challenge ourselves as a society to face up to the problems at hand and address them with ingenuity, strategic purpose and realistic expectations of the services that can, and must, be provided.

As a start, my government has broken down the health care monolith in government into two distinct functions: health planning, and health service delivery.

For the first time in our province's history, four ministers have been appointed to focus on Health Planning, Health Services, Mental Health, and Intermediate, Long Term and Home Care.

The thrust of my government's approach to renewing public health care will be to devote more of each health dollar to patient care.

This includes the commitment to fully fund the multi-year $125 million mental health initiative.

As another first in Canada, my government has appointed a Minister of State for Mental Health to oversee that program and to devote the time and energy needed to tackle the crucial needs in mental health.

In addition to a rural and remote training and support program, my government will establish provincial health standards; provide a five million dollar rural travel assistance program; increase residency positions; enhance training for ambulance attendants; and make a

substantial commitment to tele-health and increased locum support.

All of those commitments will be met over the course of the next four years.

My government also intends to ally itself with British Columbians in the months and years ahead to deliver on its commitment to open, build and operate an additional 5,000 intermediate and long-term care beds by 2006.

And in this session, my government will deliver on its pledge to repeal the law that permitted the expropriation without compensation of health facilities owned by charitable organizations.

All of those commitments will be backstopped by a new approach to provide children and families with the support they need to lead healthy, happy lives. The new Minister of State for Women's Equality will play an important role in that endeavour, as will the new Minister of Human Resources.

And the Minister of Children and Family Development will be supported by Canada's first-ever Minister of State for Early Childhood Development.

Funding will be targeted to where it is most needed, and to the people who most need help. To that end, my government will increase emphasis on early childhood intervention programs for families with special needs children.

Over the next years, my government will enhance training, resources and authority for front-line social workers to properly protect children at risk. The two non-government members of the Assembly will be expressly invited to join in advancing that aim.

Moreover, my government will keep its promise to appoint an independent task force to review the options, models, costs and effectiveness of private sector pay equity legislation and to make recommendations to the Legislature.

My government will be unwavering in its efforts to provide aboriginal British Columbians with the same sense of hope and opportunity as non-aboriginal British Columbians. To that end, my government will establish a permanent First Citizens' Forum that will provide aboriginal citizens living on- and off-reserves with a means to share their priorities and ideas with my government.

The Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services will focus on ensuring that the day-to-day services that are important in every community are delivered in a thoughtful, accountable and effective way.

The Premier and the Minister of State for Intergovernmental Relations will work to ensure that the federal government is living up to its responsibility to materially improve the quality of life, education and health care of aboriginal families, both on- and off-reserve.

For its part, my government will make a major financial commitment to advance that goal. As promised, it will double the First Citizens' Fund from $36 million to $72 million over the next four years.

My government will consult First Nations leaders to determine what changes, if any, should be made to that Fund to maximize its benefit to native friendship centres, aboriginal students and aboriginal families.

Efforts will be redoubled to address urban aboriginal issues, to build capacity, and to negotiate reasonable interim measures agreements.

My government will honour its pledge to fast-track treaty talks, under the Attorney General's guidance as the Minister Responsible for Treaty Negotiations.

British Columbians want to negotiate fair and honourable treaty settlements with First Nations. They also want a direct say on the principles those treaties will reflect.

Within the next year, my government will fulfill its commitment to hold a provincial referendum on the principles that will guide my government's approach to treaty negotiations. In this session, a legislative committee will be appointed to consult with all British Columbians, including First Nations. That committee will draft the questions that will be asked in the referendum.

My government will also offer to negotiate delegated models of self-government with First Nations, to ensure that all aboriginal governments have the same legal status in British Columbia as they do in every other province.

As the minister responsible for justice, the Attorney General will ensure the protection of aboriginal rights, and will ensure that the rule

of law applies equally for all British Columbians under our country's Constitution.

My government will also initiate a far-reaching reform of local governance. It began with the appointment of a new Minister of State for Community Charter.

In this session, legislation creating a Community Charter Council will be introduced. The Council will be tasked with preparing draft Community Charter legislation which will be submitted by January 15, 2002, for debate in the spring session.

Legislation will also be introduced this session to formally codify the elimination of photo radar in British Columbia — another commitment made and kept.

My government's new era of hope will embrace a scientifically-based, principled approach to environmental management — one that ensures sustainability, accountability and responsibility.

Two ministers now share this responsibility: the new Minister of Sustainable Resource Management, and the new Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection.

My government's commitment to science-based environmental and resource management will be paramount. For example, an independent, scientific panel has been appointed to review grizzly bear management in British Columbia and to report back by January 31, 2002. In the meantime, guide outfitters and rural British Columbians will be allowed to get on with their lives and businesses, secure in the knowledge that their values will be respected.

My government also promised to oppose the proposed Sumas 2 power project in Washington State. It will continue to play a leadership role in fighting that project in defense of clean air in the Fraser Valley. Already my government has served notice that it intends to seek intervener status to stop that proposal.

A New Era in Public Service

My government also promised to usher in a new era in public service, and it is doing just that.

A brand new system of Cabinet decision-making has been implemented that ensures all Government Caucus members are entitled to be involved at every step.

Five Government Caucus Committees have been created. They are chaired by Private Members and are open to all Government Caucus members for full participation. Those committees will play an integral role in holding Cabinet accountable and they will give all government MLAs an unprecedented voice in government decision-making.

My government also promised to establish open Cabinet meetings, at least once a month — another groundbreaking initiative in Canada. This has already proven to be of value and will lift the veil of secrecy that has always shrouded Cabinet decision-making in our system of governance.

Another vital reform is my government's commitment to establish a fixed date for provincial elections in British Columbia. The B.C. *Constitution Act* will be amended in this session to require provincial elections to be held on a fixed date every four years. In the event of a lost vote of confidence, the Lieutenant Governor will be requested to exercise his constitutional prerogative.

Beginning this session, my government will also allow free votes in the Legislature on all matters not specifically identified as confidence votes.

Fundamental matters of confidence are votes on the Throne Speech, the budget, and laws giving force to my government's election commitments.

All MLAs deserve the opportunity to help define the solutions to the problems we all confront. Just as the Legislature is meant to serve the public, so the Cabinet is meant to serve the Legislature.

Active legislative committees will be appointed to ensure that happens.

Other critical reforms are also underway.

A set legislative calendar for this year and next was announced in last week's open Cabinet meeting, along with the date of my new government's first full provincial budget.

That budget will be tabled on Tuesday, February 19, 2002, and subsequent budgets will be tabled each year on the third Tuesday in February.

My government will act in this session to make good on its commitment to initiate Merit Employment legislation to ensure British Columbians are being served by a professional, non-partisan public service appointed strictly on merit.

And my government has acted to launch a "Waste Buster" website, to enable taxpayers to help identify, report and stamp out government waste. The site will be up and running in short order and should result in substantial savings and efficiencies.

My government will extend the principle of transparency in other new ways.

A law will be introduced in this session to require the registration of professional lobbyists who are paid to lobby government on behalf of their clients. The list of registered lobbyists will be open to the public and available at the Office of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Commissioner.

My government will also advance British Columbia's interests in Confederation through a constructive, cooperative approach to intergovernmental relations.

Next week, my government will host the annual Premiers' conference. It is an exciting opportunity to reassume British Columbia's leadership role in nation building.

As Chairman of that forum, the Premier will be working cooperatively with other Canadian premiers to tackle the most pressing challenges of our times.

First among those challenges is the universal, national problem to properly fund and maintain our public health care system, in keeping with the five principles of the *Canada Health Act*.

My government will seek to highlight that challenge in the next week and beyond, to ensure that the federal government assumes its fair share of responsibility in funding our national health objectives. As promised, my government will also call on the federal government to restore its full health funding withdrawn over the years through budget cuts.

My government will work closely with the federal government and all B.C. Members of Parliament, regardless of their party, to advance a clear and firm B.C. agenda.

That agenda will include the goal of eliminating interprovincial trade barriers; rationalizing jurisdictions of decision-making; reducing overlaps; and ensuring a more equitable share of federal transfer payments, transportation funding and federal government contracts.

It will include working with other provinces to negotiate a more equitable federal equalization program that is consistent with the Canadian Constitution. And it will include seeking the repatriation of the Nanoose Bay seabed.

My government will work with the federal government in pursuit of a fair program of relief for owners of leaky condos and the potential development of the Vancouver Trade and Convention Centre. A decision on this project is required quickly. Working with the federal government, my government will finalize the analysis of the costs and benefits of the Convention Centre, and work with the business community to determine if it is possible to establish a realistic funding formula.

Consistent with its economic revitalization and deregulation agenda, my government will also ask the federal government to work with my ministries to rationalize and streamline our overlapping environmental approval processes.

My government will also initiate a series of "British Columbia Dialogues."

It will host an annual "Provincial Congress" that will bring together all B.C. MLAs, MPs and Senators. This forum will also include the mayors from our province's 12 largest cities, the presidents of the five regional municipal associations, the president of the Union of B.C. Municipalities, and aboriginal leaders.

The Congress will help to establish an inclusive understanding of B.C.'s agenda and will aim to publicly identify and overcome issues of regional alienation within Canada and British Columbia. My government trusts all participants will accept this initiative in the spirit in which it is intended, to forge new linkages and communication between jurisdictions, regions and, above all, between *people*.

That Congress is one of four annual dialogues my government will sponsor at Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue. Others will include a dialogue on education, a dialogue on health care and the permanent First Citizens' Forum.

Taken in their entirety, the measures I have outlined constitute my government's new approach to rebuilding our economy, renewing

public health care, improving education and restoring public trust and confidence. The vast array of policies and initiatives my government has set forth here, as well as in its platform, offers new hope for prosperity under a new era of leadership and public service.

The blueprint for change that my government has put forward is the foundation for building a better British Columbia.

Like any plan, it will present its own unforeseeable challenges.

But the architects of progress who built our province made their mark by daring and by *doing*. They welcomed each challenge as a building block upon which to learn and push their dreams higher than they had ever imagined possible.

Today in our province we have many such "building blocks." More importantly, we have so many bright, talented people who stand ready to help do the tough work that must be done in the months and years ahead.

British Columbians want my government to succeed. They want it to lead. And they expect it to act boldly, with courage and conviction. My government will honour that trust, to help our province reach its fullest potential.

So now, grateful for the privilege of having held this post and for the attention that all members have afforded me — I leave you with important deliberations on behalf of the people of our great province. I wish you well. I wish you good health, and God bless.